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We Birds of Winter

John Grey

In January, rooms smell of pine elixirs.
Windows are scrubbed clean on one side,
ice over on the other. I keep busy in
modest ways. Outside, ravens
are dragged into my frame by the
contrasting whiteness of snow.

I write some, to others, to myself.
I bake cookies, make cider. Is that
a stray grackle out there? What's
it doing this far north? It mourns
a cornfield desecrated by cold.

The ravens are better prepared.
Carrion sees them through. Their big
dark eyes know there will be dead.

I step outside with the trash at dusk,
shock the birds into filling the sky
like dabs of dull color
against blood-soaked horizon.

Only the ravens remain grounded.
They're smart enough to think
they know what they're dealing with in me.

Gray light, shadow, a pickup in the wind.
slow my appetite for daytime tasks.
These black birds retreat to thick wood roosts.
In harsh worlds,
we are of the same survival.
The room with the electric light,
the branch, the squeeze of satin feathered bodies...
all under siege.

Then, when the temperature is low enough,
something kicks in.
A heartbeat always.
A radiator if available.